



Adding a Spark to ESL Homework With YouTubers

by [Hall Houston](#)

In my classes, I frequently design homework involving short videos produced by a new tribe of celebrities known as YouTubers. I find this generally appeals to students more than traditional homework assignments, as watching short videos on YouTube is already a well-loved activity among university students.

What is a YouTuber? According to [Wikipedia](#), a YouTuber is “a type of internet celebrity and videographer who has gained popularity from their videos on the video-sharing website, YouTube.” Though YouTubers (also known as YouTube personalities or YouTube celebrities), all produce videos, the content of these videos varies greatly. Some, such as the glamorous [Michelle Phan](#), deliver beauty tips. Others, such as [Smosh](#) (a duo consisting of Ian Hecox and Anthony Padilla) make videos of their own comedic skits. To millennials, YouTubers such as [PewDewPie](#) and [Ryan Higa](#) are equally as popular as world-famous singers and actors. (For more information about popular YouTubers, see Dredge, 2016, and Stone, 2015.)

Though these YouTubers’ videos could certainly help students learn English, I tend to use videos especially produced for English language learners. Now, I will briefly introduce some of the best YouTubers who consistently produce high-quality, enjoyable videos for ESL/EFL students.

Best YouTubers for Teaching English

[English with Lucy](#)

A charming and eloquent YouTuber from the United Kingdom, Lucy has been making videos for English learners since 2016. She has more than 120 videos on her channel with videos covering grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Her videos include a lot of wit and humor, so it’s no surprise that she has more than a million subscribers.

[Eat Sleep Dream English](#)

In these videos, YouTuber Tom introduces English language learners to British English. His well-produced videos are entertaining and cover numerous areas of English, such as vocabulary, pronunciation, speaking, slang, common errors in English, and useful expressions. In addition, he has a few videos on other subjects, including London, British food, and even a few glimpses of his personal family life.

[Speak English with Christina](#)

Christina has made around 200 fun, clever videos introducing students to American English. Her videos cover not only grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, but they also tackle learning strategies, American culture, business English, and small talk. She began producing videos in 2015 and now has more than 200,000 subscribers. Please note: her videos are aimed at EFL students in France, so occasionally the videos feature a bit of the French language.

[mmmEnglish](#)

Emma is the YouTuber behind this channel of cleverly produced videos, covering areas of learning English such as grammar, phrasal verbs, vocabulary, and idioms. In addition, she has several videos related to food, cooking, and eating, a topic clearly close to her heart. Emma is from Australia, so this is the perfect channel for students who want to become familiar with Australian English.

Using YouTube in Class

Use the following steps to utilize these YouTube channels to encourage your students to learn English in and out of class watching YouTube.

Step 1: Introducing the YouTuber

Before the semester begins, look over several channels and consider which ones will appeal the most to your students. Next, choose a video to share with the class. Take some notes and prepare a few questions to ask the class based on the video, preferably using a mix of different question types (short answer, true or false, fill-in-the-blank). Base questions not only on the language content, but also the visual content. In class, play only a minute or two of the video, then begin asking your questions. Play the video segment again if necessary. To encourage students to watch more, provide students with a link to the video (e.g., embedded on your university's learning management system) and tell them to watch the rest of the video in their spare time. You can post additional questions for students to answer.

Step 2: Assigning Homework

After two class periods where you preview a video with the class, assign them to choose a video from the YouTuber's channel, but ask them to refrain from selecting one you've watched in class. Emphasize that they should look over the videos carefully and choose one that appeals to them. Provide a worksheet divided into two sections, Before Watching and After Watching (see the Appendix). I always show my class an example of an exceptionally well-written report, and remind them to take extra time and invest some thought into filling out the sheet, instead of scribbling down a couple of words here and there.

The Before Watching section requires students to identify which video they chose. Furthermore, students need to write down the reason they chose the video, what they know about the subject, and what they want to know. I feel that this work helps students to focus on their own connection with the subject, and predict what they might hear in the video.

In the After Watching section, students need to express their feelings about the video. They need to explain why they liked it or hated it. Also, they need to write five words or phrases they picked up from the video. Finally, they need to write three questions they would like to ask the YouTuber. This allows students to reflect on the content of the video and consolidate their learning.

Step 3: Collecting Homework

On the day that the assignment is due, a few minutes before the bell rings, collect the homework. I recommend using a method called "The Homework Chair" (Grove, 1998): I put a chair in the front of the blackboard, and write HOMEWORK in big letters on the board, with an arrow pointing to the chair. Once the bell rings, I pick up all the papers in the chair. Papers that are delivered later receive slightly lower scores. (You can learn more about this simple, but powerful technique in Grove's, 1998, article, "[The Homework Chair](#).")

Step 4: Marking and Returning Homework

When you look over students' homework, keep an eye open for papers that show a great deal of effort, as well as the occasional paper that indicates the student made little effort or misunderstood the assignment. In some, but not all, cases, leave notes for the students. If many students did not seem to enjoy watching the YouTuber's videos, make a note and choose another YouTuber for the next semester.

In the next lesson, return the homework to the students, giving praise to the students who made the most effort. If a student did poorly, speak to that student in private, and give him or her an opportunity to do the assignment again.

Other Ways to Use YouTubers in Class

This is the format I use, but I'm aware there are lots of other possibilities for exploiting English language teaching YouTuber videos in class, including:

- Using videos from YouTubers that reinforce grammar or vocabulary covered in your coursebook
- Adding a few questions to exams based on content in the videos
- Assigning students to do individual or group presentations in class about their favorite YouTubers
- Asking students to share videos from their favorite YouTubers on your learning management system
- Exploiting non-ELT YouTuber channels for intermediate or advanced level classes

And one more suggestion: If you are interested in doing project work with your students, you might consider asking them to create their own YouTube channel, basing their videos on language covered in recent lessons. Who knows? Perhaps someone in your classroom might end up being a well-known YouTuber!

References

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